In his book The Common Roots of Europe, *Bronislaw Geremek investigates the mechanisms which throughout history have bonded the different peoples on the continent into a single Europe. He supports a connection between the East and West of Europe, rejecting the false division which some people continue to propose. As he summed it up in a recent speech, 'The eastward expansion of the European Union can be considered as a process of European unification. United, Europe may become an important partner of global political and economic interdependence'.*

As a founder member of the Solidarity movement and Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs (1997-2000), Bronislaw Geremek spoke out in favour of freedom and justice for Poles and other Europeans subject to Soviet totalitarianism. The success of the strike by the workers at the Lenin shipyard created a zone of freedom where Poles could recognize and accept the reality of their situation: they were isolated from the rest of the world. Thanks to the events of 1980, the Poles understood that the promises of the Communists were worthless. They realized the extent to which the 'national interest' which the regime said it protected was exclusively a question of Communist interests.

From his seat in the European Parliament, Bronislaw Geremek works for the unity of Europe, because he knows at first hand that isolation, division, and anti-globalization lead to impoverishment. His book Poverty: a History *examines the unease which poverty has always provoked among the best-off section of any society. Bronislaw Geremek finds among those who are made uneasy by the gap between rich and poor the seed of the socialist utopias which promised to relieve these differences, but whose result was the slavery of the unfortunate, and renewed submission to poverty. One of the main characteristics of slavery is the isolation of the slave from the rest of society. And poverty is born from isolation.*

Resisting pacifically and unceasingly, Bronislaw Geremek and others like him demolished the Berlin Wall from within. Without his support and rebellion against the dictates of the Politburo, the great event of 9 November 1989, the liberation of a Europe trapped and enslaved by the Communist regime and its subsequent reunification, would not have been possible. It is worth recalling that the armed martyrs such as Che Guevara or Yassir Arafat, who are so celebrated by the Left and who have sold so many T-shirts with their images, have always failed in their attempts to unite their peoples with the rest of the world and improve their lot.

Ana Palacio

Bronislaw Geremek gave his lecture on 14/01/2005.

THE POLISH TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND THE EUROPEAN IDEA OF FREEDOM

Bronislaw Geremek

Following the historic enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004 and with negotiations underway on further expansion, Europe is more than ever faced at the start of 2005 with a dilemma as to its identity. This debate cannot be reduced to a question of simply deciding where Europe's geographical borders lie, given that the answer would be entirely arbitrary. In the late 18th century, the Tsar asked Tatistchev, the court geographer, to define the border dividing European Russia from Asian Russia. This was a practical issue, given that it was necessary to reorganize the administration of the two areas. Tatistchev drew the border at the Urals, dividing the two administrative areas of the Tsar's empire, and in effect established Europe's eastern frontier. Who is the Tatistchev of today who might be entrusted with defining Europe's borders?

The geographical maps which used to grace the tables of important international conferences and the idea that geographical consultations might play a decisive role in decision-making are features of a past that will never return. (The Dayton Agreements merely represent the exception that confirms the rule.) As far as I know, the European Commission does not employ any official geographers in Brussels, and for very good reasons. It seems to be axiology rather than geography that defines Europe. European axiology appears to influence our vision of the future, but it cannot be dissociated from the history of European civilization, which has formed the basis of our shared European values and collective memory. I would like to emphasize that when I talk about 'collective memory', what I have in mind is more a task yet to be completed than an existing psychological reality. For terms such as 'Europeans' or 'European citizen' to make sense it is not only necessary to refer to an ethnic reality or a legal status, but also to an awareness of the processes and events that have shaped Europe and the European soul. We must refer to

European history, its inventive spirit, its notion of the State based on the rule of law and its idea of democracy, the way in which it promotes individuals, its passion for freedom. European history is, above all, about the desire for freedom. It is a long history that begins with the liberation of the serfs and the birth of peoples in Medieval Europe, a process that continues throughout the vicissitudes of the Modern Era. And within that history the year 1989, the year that marked the end of the partition of Europe, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, occupies a special place. It was Poland that set this formidable process towards freedom in motion.

During Prague's 'Velvet Revolution' in the autumn of 1989, banners appeared featuring a text that was somewhat strange, but which had a very encouraging message for those participating in the events: 'Poland: 10 years, Hungary: 10 months, GDR (East Germany): 10 weeks, Czechoslovakia: 10 days'. I can easily understand the pride my friends in Prague felt when they wrote that slogan. Nevertheless, it also reminds me that the recovery of our freedom in Central Europe, and what we consider to be our 'return to Europe', was a long and arduous battle.

The stages of the process are marked by the Berlin Uprising of 1953, the demonstrations of public anger in Poznan in June, the Budapest riots of October 1956, the hopes that were raised by the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, and the huge trade union strikes that took place in Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980. These movements should not be dismissed as merely desperate dissident rejection of the Communist regimes that made up the gigantic Soviet Empire, given that both the Budapest uprising and the social ferment in Prague in favour of 'socialism with a human face' were both based on political projects. However, civil society's capacity for self-organization was demonstrated, above all, in the series of events that took place in Poland, not so much *against* the Communist regime, but ignoring its leaders and structures. Twenty-five years ago, the 1980 strikes in Gdansk and the founding of the trade union known as *Solidarność* (Solidarity) represented the ultimate expression of the peaceful struggle for survival and freedom.

Once again, it was the workers who rose up against a regime that identified itself with the working classes, against the only party that existed, called the Workers' Party. The workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, along with other shipyard workers on the Baltic coast, went on strike on 14 August 1980. A young shipyard worker, Lech Walesa, who had been a committed supporter of the activities of the clandestine democratic opposition, became the leader of the strike. The most immediate reasons for strike action were economic. However, among the 21 demands were calls for the establishment of free trade unions, legalization of the right to strike, freedom of expression and the implementation of structural economic reforms. The Solidarity movement initially spread along the Baltic coast, and subsequently throughout the whole of Poland. People from the country took provisions to the workers who had locked themselves inside the Gdansk shipyard, and the intelligentsia throughout Poland tried to give them support. The stateless workers that Marx talked about had become the mainstay of the national cause and sang 'So that Poland can be Poland'. The idea of *solidarity* represented a programme of considerable human significance. In contrast to the official ideology of class struggle, it proposed the solidarity of a people thirsty for freedom, the solidarity of men and women from different social backgrounds, the solidarity of those who carried no weapons in their encounters with the police, with the army, with the Soviet ships that patrolled the Baltic or with the Soviet military stationed on Polish soil.

Over the great gate of the striking shipyard, under the sign that read 'Lenin Naval Shipyard', was a portrait of John Paul II. The Polish Pope, who had assumed his throne in Rome a year earlier after departing from his native country, declared the following words to his fellow countrymen in a huge square in Warsaw: 'Be not afraid'.

I shall not describe the epic events that took place in Poland in the month of August 1980. The films of Andrzej Wajda, books such as Timothy Garton Ash's on the 'Polish Revolution', and collections of pamphlets and songs describe them much better than I ever could. I would simply like to tell you about my recollections of those ten days that I spent in the Gdansk shipyard, about that unforgettable memory of a desire for freedom and the happiness of finally recovering that freedom. Twenty-five years later, just a few weeks ago, I experienced the same moral climate, the same spontaneity and the same sense of determination among the Ukrainians who had assembled in Independence Square, the famous *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* in Kiev. We might respond to the question about Europe's borders by stating that it is this aspiration for freedom and human dignity that mark the real boundaries.

On 31 August, the Gdansk Accords, an unprecedented agreement between a Communist authoritarian power and society, led to the creation of a huge, free trade union, one that attracted some ten million members. Subsequently, for a period of 500 days, Poland became the only country in the Soviet bloc where people living in the country had a right to private property and where the most important moral influence was that of the Church, but also where an organized civil society continued to exist. On 13 December 1981, the Government decreed a 'state of war' against its own citizens. Poles themselves implemented the Soviet plan to repress the freedom movement, claiming dozens of lives and leading to tens of thousands of detentions, followed by imprisonment and persecution.

The Polish experience conveyed a convincing message concerning the nature of the Communist system, but also of how best to offer resistance. Western journalists stayed on in Poland after the Gdansk strike, not only informing public opinion in their own countries, but also indirectly informing Polish public opinion through Radio Free Europe. ('Who let them in?' various dignitaries of the regime asked themselves.) The imposition of martial law in Poland was viewed by some European political leaders as the inevitable solution. It was even received with a certain sense of relief, given that it avoided the risk of confrontation between East and West. The reaction of one foreign affairs minister –'we shall do nothing, *of course*'– reflected the attitude of the majority of Western foreign ministries. However, European public opinion was shocked by this development and expressed its support for the Polish people. The *Solidarity* emblem created a real European public forum. It also had reverberations in that 'other Europe', the Europe that stretches from the Urals to the Baltic Sea. A few days ago we learned about what happened to Iulius Filip, a Romanian worker who wrote a letter in 1981 to the First National Congress of Solidarity. He paid a very high price for that letter, eight years' imprisonment for 'anti-socialist activities'. The Gdansk Congress appealed to all the workers of Eastern Europe, demanding their right to freedom. At that time, a call such as this constituted a veritable time-bomb, one that set off all the security alarm bells, but a quarter of a century later it may be seen as one of the founding acts of European solidarity.

What best defined that minister's famous 'of course' was the idea of stifling the legal existence of that mass movement known as Solidarity, of preventing its clandestine survival, of eliminating all resistance against repression. For a short period of time, the military government managed to improve the country's economic situation and imposed a certain momentary social calm that was based on feelings of resignation and impotence. The government sought to justify its role within the country by pointing to the absence of a domestic political alternative and the danger of external intervention, in other words a repetition of the Budapest and Prague scenario. However, the real situation contradicted these arguments. The Soviet Union was militarily and morally exhausted after the defeats it had suffered in Afghanistan. With Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, it had become immersed in a series of internal reforms (*perestroika*) and political liberalization measures (*glasnost*), making it less prepared than ever to intervene.

Furthermore, the work carried out by the clandestine structure sustained by Solidarity and the dissemination of a second wave of information and ideas by an entire network of underground printing presses, convinced people that a real political alternative did, in fact, exist. In 1976, when the demonstrations that took place in Radom led to the headquarters of the local Communist party being burned down, Jacek Kuroń, one of the historic leaders of the Polish opposition, famously declared: 'Don't burn down their committees; set up your own committees'. In the 1980s this desire became a reality. The surveys carried out by the regime's institutions revealed the people's growing distrust of the State economy. In 1988, some 73% of the population was not only in favour of the market economy, but also of the private sector. Almost half of the respondents declared that they were in favour of legalizing the political opposition. The illegitimate nature of the Communist regime was obvious and the political alternative began to gain ground.

Let me pause for a moment in my story in order to recall an extremely simple truth. On occasion, history seems to be pre-ordained because we already know how events have turned out. We know that the year 1989 erased the Communists from the European map and led to the collapse of the Soviet empire. We might consider this to be simply a question of justice or a logical historical development. However, even the most optimistic observers, even the most faithful disciples of Master Pangloss, would agree that it would have been difficult to predict that these events would take place in 1989, since they could have occurred five, fifteen or thirty years later. The legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which nobody claims any longer, could well have survived up until its centenary in 2017. If we play the game of probabilistic history, history based on the expression 'What if...?', we might say that, if the desire for freedom in 1989 had not been accompanied by a rejection of violence, a rejection of any confrontation or clash between East and West, history could have turned out quite differently. It was not prudent diplomacy, but people's prudent restraint that led to the miracle of 1989.

Now to return to my account of the events as they really did happen, without digressing further into the philosophy of history. In 1988, following a series of strikes, the Communist authorities of Poland realized that they were unable to control the situation without resorting to drastic methods, in other words violence. The regime had been clearly weakened and its attempts at liberalization had contributed to this. Tocqueville was right when he wrote that authoritarian regimes sow the seeds of their own destruction when they attempt to reform. The Polish Communist regime could have taken a step backwards. It could have abandoned the political liberalization process and opted to develop a market economy without democracy, by increasing economic freedom and suppressing political freedom. On 13 December 1981 the Polish Communists had decided to use armed force against society and reject any kind of political dialogue with Solidarity. This had been the only way of maintaining power and protecting the interests and plans of the Soviet Union. However, in 1989 their choice was quite different. They believed that their interests could be preserved in a different manner, or they believed that they would be able to make a series of passing concessions that would not change the essential nature of the system and that could be cancelled after a period of time, as had happened with the New Economic Policy of Soviet Russia in 1921. I am prepared to accept that in 1989 the Communist leaders were serving their country and that they took this decision consciously. One of them, at the end of 1989, told me that he believed he was witnessing the end of his world. The Soviet Union, which he considered to be his second homeland, was disintegrating. Marxism-Leninism, his religion, had become an outdated and anachronistic philosophy. And the working class, of which he considered himself to be a representative, was turning its back on him and his party, offering its support to Solidarity and the Catholic Church.

I refuse to accept the idea that the imposition of martial law in December 1981 saved Poland from Soviet intervention and was the lesser of two evils. It was evil in itself. In 1989 the

Communists participated in creating the necessary conditions for a peaceful transition towards democracy, for a negotiated revolution. I believe that in this case, they at least deserve the benefit of the doubt.

In the early 1980s, in a survey carried out among Polish students, only 4% of the students responded affirmatively to the following question: 'Would you like the form of socialism that exists in Poland to spread to the rest of the world?' Sociologists who analysed the situation in Poland at that time stated that the social conflict took the form of a conflict of values rather than a conflict of interests (the thesis of Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski). Within that conflict, Solidarity managed to articulate a programme for national independence and for democracy and freedom, opposing the Communist system head-on. In view of this polarization of positions, it was never going to be easy to develop a political process that would be able to avoid confrontation, that could lead along the path of negotiation, preventing the two sides from clashing or adopting radical positions.

At first, the Communist authorities sought to avoid recognizing Solidarity as a partner at all costs, given that this would represent a public admission that the military operations of 13 December had failed. Thus, they rejected any idea of 'trade union pluralism', that is to say, a new legalization of Solidarity, which would also have included a certain political pluralism. Initially, they thought they would be able to convince the Church to form a Christian trade union or to commit itself to assuming joint responsibility for the political situation within the country, either directly or under the auspices of secular political representation. However, the Church categorically refused to accept these propositions and reiterated the fact that Solidarity was the only valid partner for negotiation. The Communist authorities then proposed to negotiate a social pact at a series of round-table talks made up of non-governmental organizations, from which Solidarity was excluded. Finally, the authorities were forced to accept that they had no choice but to negotiate with society, on the condition that they would be able to name its representatives. This programme was known as 'combat and understanding': combat against all democratic opposition and any kind of social or political pluralism, and understanding for the founders of the regime. This was not only an expression of hostility towards Solidarity, which identified with democracy and pluralism, but was also a blind pursuit of a monopolistic philosophy, of the power and monocracy of the Communist apparatus.

In the autumn of 1988, a grand congress of 'militant workers' continued to exclude any possibility of pluralism, and General W. Jaruzelski declared that he was not prepared to negotiate with 'those who called the country's legal and constitutional order into question'. It was the state of the national economy that finally forced the government to make the necessary concessions.

As far as Solidarity was concerned, a number of different strategies emerged, ranging from radical programmes to abolish the regime to arguments that envisaged a form of collaboration with the reformist wing of the ruling Communist party, in the name of 'political realism'. Lech Walesa's unshakeable authority guaranteed the cohesion of his movement, the unity of its clandestine and quasi-legal structures and, above all, the representative nature of Solidarity, which was the only movement capable of speaking on behalf of society. The amnesty of 1986 and the subsequent liberation of political prisoners made it possible to look for political solutions. A return to the principle of trade union pluralism, in other words the legalization of Solidarity, was an essential condition in any negotiation. We repeated tirelessly: 'There is no freedom without solidarity.' With regard to this point, the Communists were equally determined. They were prepared to accept a certain degree of plurality in political matters, but never pluralism in trade union activities. After 1987 Solidarity developed an 'anti-crisis pact' whose aim was to establish a pact with society in order

to carry out a policy of economic reform, a policy formulated jointly by the ruling authorities in the country and Solidarity.

This pact may be considered the starting-point for a period of organic transformation in which the public sphere, controlled by the Communist Party, was restricted to military and international functions, whilst freedom became the essential maxim for the economy and for social life. The key to this vision of the future lay in civil society. It was less utopian than may have initially appeared, given that this programme did not recognize that freedom is contagious and has the propensity to create its own expansion mechanisms. It proved necessary to apply a certain level of self-restraint with regard to society's aspirations in order to avoid, above all, any violent confrontation or the spectre of a clash between two large blocs. The need to carry out structural and economic changes both in the economy and in political life became increasingly urgent, but it was necessary to create a pact between society and the apparatus of power in order to carry out the revolution in a non-revolutionary manner, so that a democracy set up by anti-democratic methods could become legitimate and valid.

To use the image borrowed from Archilochus which Sir Isaiah Berlin employed in *The Hedgehog and the Fox*[1], I would say that they were like the fox, who knows very little about many things, and we were like the hedgehog, who only knows about one thing, but the most important thing of all: a thing called freedom.

The televised debate of 30th November 1988 between the Politburo member and head of the official trade union and Lech Walesa was meant to achieve everything that the regime's propaganda campaign had failed to achieve up until that time: to destroy the Walesa legend and make the leader of Solidarity look ridiculous. However, quite the reverse occurred. Walesa, the indisputable victor in the contest, returned to public life with 64% support, whilst the question as to whether Solidarity should be legalized received a 73% vote in favour. Walesa 's visit to Paris a few days later at the invitation of François Mitterrand confirmed the European legend that Walesa had become and offered him an opportunity to present his political programme.

On 6 February 1989, the Round Table brought together 56 representatives from the regime, the democratic opposition, and the two main trade unions, as well as a number of independent intellectuals, and they all got down to work. In preparing for the Round Table, representatives of the Church also played an essential role in their capacity as observers, mediators and witnesses. The Round Table brought together two sides that were hostile and distrustful, one set against the other. Only the Church could guarantee the minimum level of trust required for the negotiations to take place and, what is more, to enable them to prosper.

The two months of negotiations entailed by the Round-Table talks, until the agreements of 5 April 1989 were signed, represented an ongoing confrontation between two different, and in the majority of cases opposing, points of view. This was an unprecedented event. Sitting face-to-face around the table were members of the ancien régime and the representatives of change; members of the authoritarian government and representatives of civil society; the authorities who were aware of their illegitimate claim to power and the opposition who were convinced of their own legitimacy.

[1] Berlin, Sir Isaiah (1953). The Hedgehog and the Fox, New York, Simon and Schuster.

This did not take place in the streets or at the barricades, but around a table, throughout the course of a series of negotiations featuring the participation of those who had only recently pulled down the walls of their prisons and freed themselves from their jailers. It was not at all easy to reach agreement in such conditions. In fact, it seemed impossible. On both sides there were members who presented staunch resistance to any kind of agreement whatsoever. However, throughout the negotiations, the matter of the country's best interests came up time and again, and this is what enabled the parties to reach an agreement.

In the beginning, the main problem consisted of securing an acknowledgement of the principle of trade union pluralism and the legalization of Solidarity itself. To everybody's surprise, once this decision was taken, the problem ceased to be so grave. Political issues then became the main talking points for the Round Table. With regard to the decisions concerning the parliamentary elections that were to take place on 4 June, the Communist authorities sought to guarantee at least the preservation of their political dominance, if not the survival of their power monopoly. The pact provided that only 35% of the seats in the lower chamber of parliament, the Sejm, would be chosen in free elections; the rest would be reserved for the Communist Party and its satellite parties. The Senate would be constituted by means of free elections, but it would be deprived of political authority. The short period of time allocated for the electoral campaign favoured the Communists, who had all the necessary organizational structures at their disposal, not to mention the media and unlimited financial resources. However, all the regime's calculations proved useless and completely unfounded. Solidarity's electoral campaign focused on Lech Walesa, the undisputed national leader, and it was organized by means of civic committees set up spontaneously in all the country's cities and even its smaller towns. By opposing those in power, society based its campaign on a simple choice: 'them' or 'us', without any need for political parties to act as intermediaries.

The success of the Solidarity movement and the failure of the Communist regime were overwhelming. All of the seats that corresponded to freely-elected positions went to Solidarity. The Communists did not win any seats at all in the Senate, and their majority vanished in the Sejm because the satellite parties immediately abandoned them. The first government featured Communist ministers in charge of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior (Poland was still a member of the Warsaw Pact), but the Head of Government was Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

The Communist regime collapsed without a single bullet being fired, without broken windows, without acts of violence, without bloodshed. These events had a domino effect throughout the entire region. In Budapest another series of round-table talks was set up, following the Polish example, whilst the 'Velvet Revolution' brought a change of regime in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin Wall was smashed.

For a certain period of time, the corpse of Communism continued to poison the political climate. All kinds of mistakes were made, social disenchantment set in and the economic transformation was traumatic. However, change was inevitable and definitive.

It may be a coincidence that the events of 1989, that annus mirabilis, should have taken place two hundred years after the French Revolution. It is easy to draw a parallel between the two changes in regime. However, one question does suggest itself. Are there any grounds that might lead us to believe that what happened in Central Europe was actually a revolution?